



SAFETY ALERT 07-00

**17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
P. O. Box 25517**

Juneau, Alaska 99802

www.uscg.mil/d17/FVSWEB/d17fvs.htm

CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM

MSO Anchorage	271-6725	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-2448	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	283-3292

VESSEL GROUNDS, ONE LIFE LOST **COPPER RIVER DELTA, ALASKA**

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information of “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of the Coast Guard’s “Ready for Sea” safety program.

Incident: On May 29, 2000 a 34 foot gillnetter fishing in the Copper River Delta was discovered aground on the beach by the crew of a nearby fishing vessel. The Coast Guard was notified and dispatched a helicopter to investigate. The helicopter crew found the vessel’s deceased operator in the water near the vessel. The vessel’s engines were running but the shaft was not engaged. There were several red salmon on deck and the net reel was engaged, indicating the fisherman was in the process of hauling in the net. The individual was found tangled in the net along with a gaff hook and a large king salmon. The person was not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) or float coat. The vessel was being operated single-handedly and the weather conditions were calm and clear at the time of the incident.

Lessons Learned: There are “Ready for Sea” safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several lessons learned.

1. Operators should consider fishing in close proximity with other vessels and establish a communications schedule with vessels in the area. This operator was alone, the nearest vessel was approximately one mile away. While operating single-handedly is a normal practice in many fisheries, using the buddy system should provide timely assistance in the event of an emergency.
2. Crew training in emergency situations is critical. Conduct drills at the dock and while underway to prepare crewmembers for emergency situations. Ask “what if questions” (what if I fall overboard, there is a galley fire, I get tangled in fishing gear, the vessel is taking on water, etc.) and plan your response.
3. PFDs keep people afloat and increase the chance of survival. Reportedly this operator normally wore a flotation jacket, however he was not wearing one at the time of the incident.
4. Fishermen are encouraged to carry a knife with them at all times, which can be used to cut through net if they or someone else becomes entangled.
5. Solo operators are encouraged to wear a personal EPIRB. Survival time in Alaska’s cold waters is extremely short; a personal EPIRB can provide immediate Coast Guard notification of a distress location.
6. Vessel owners should consider applying a non-skid surface to decks. A contributing cause to this accident may have been a slippery deck.
7. The vessel did not have a current Coast Guard dockside exam. During these free exams safety drills are discussed and safety deficiencies that can lead to loss of life or vessel can be identified.